

THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

This bulletin is published for readers at home and abroad by the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information, London, to elucidate the spiritual issues at stake in the war, and to provide information concerning the British Churches in wartime, as well as their contribution to post-war reconstruction.

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THE NORWEGIAN CHURCH STRUGGLE

THE STORY REVIEWED AND BROUGHT UP TO DATE

Svenska Dagbladet on August 27th published an article on the above subject by Professor Einar Molland. Dr. Molland was until recently continuing his work as professor of Church History at the University of Oslo, and only escaped to Sweden at the beginning of 1944. At present he is directing the Norwegian Theological courses at the University of Upsala in Sweden. We print his article below:—

A Swedish Bishop said on one occasion: "What has happened in Norway will not be forgotten for a thousand years." Norwegians agree with him. We know that what we have witnessed will fill the thoughts and hearts of future generations. Their imagination will recall the oppression under which we have conquered, the problems before which we were placed, the choice that we had to make, and they will admire the strength of thousands of Norwegian men and women, which will prove an inspiration to them. Our fight has been a struggle on the part of the Church for right, for Christian education, for the rights of parents and the home, for the liberty of the Church and of the pulpit. A great part of our modern history is the history of the Church. It is still too early to write the history of the occupation. Let us try to give an historical review of the religious struggle.

In Norway a difference is made between "Kirkestriden" (Church struggle) and "Kirkekampen" (Church fight). The Church struggle is the old struggle within the Church between two theological outlooks. This struggle, which has been known in all the Churches of Western Europe, has been exceptionally long and earnest in Norway. The Church fight is the struggle of the

Norwegian Church against Nazism. One of the happiest circumstances for the Church fight was the ending of the old religious struggle just before the war. When the Norwegian Church faced the problem of occupation, peace reigned within the Church. The proof of this was that in the Autumn of 1940 a remarkable consolidation of the Norwegian Church and the Christian front in Norway took place. On October 28th, 1940, a meeting was held in the Mission Hall at Calmeyergraten in Oslo, and on that occasion Bishop Berggrav, Bishop Stören, Professor Hallesby and the lay chief of the religious movement in the West, Ludvig Hope, gave addresses one after the other. This was surely a remarkable fact, which is neither more nor less than the inauguration of a new epoch in the contemporary history of the Church. In order to understand it better, one must call to mind another famous meeting in this same hall 20 years earlier. The chief speaker then was Professor Hallesby who then began the most active period of the religious struggle. The cry was "No collaboration with the Liberals." Several years before, Hallesby had refused all contact with Berggrav and now they stood side by side and spoke with one voice. It was still more remarkable to see at the side of these two Bishops Ludvig Hope, representing the radical religious spirit, hostile to the institution of a State Church. During preceding years he had drawn a little closer to the Church, but at this moment he determined to defend it with the others, and from that time he was one of our great men in the religious front. Another happy fact, which contributed to the success of the Church fight, was the religious revival before April 9th, which was shown by the increase

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of Church attendance and by a revival of Holy Communion. It is this awakening of religious life, which has made possible the Church fight. During the occupation the attendances at services and the numbers of Communicants have much increased. The churches are full and more than that in Norway. A large number of the faithful are eager to receive Holy Communion. The Provisional Council of the Church witnessed to this in July, 1942, when it sent to the Clergy a document containing the following paragraph:—

“Our Lord has indeed set us before an open door. The people are more eager to go to Church than ever before during the last century, consciences are open to the truth, every zealous preacher is rejoiced by a new interest for the Word of God and from all parts of the country news is received of great, worthy, true and deep religious revivals. In those circles of our people, which were far from the Church and from Christianity, eyes are opened and the Church is discovered. They respect the Church and are beginning to listen to it.”

At the centre of the Norwegian religious fight was the question of “The Church and the Order of Law.” The fight was opened by the Pastoral Letter of the Norwegian Church Bishops in February, 1941, a courageous and clear letter on the subject of order, founded on law. In it was stated: “When the authorities allow violence and injustice in society and when they oppress souls, then it is that the Church is the guardian of conscience.” This Pastoral Letter is remarkable as a religious historical document, because it shows us a Lutheran Church, which is entering into conflict with the State on the subject of law and order. In general, the Lutheran Churches are too little distinguished by a social, ethical and prophetic ideal; they are more often marked by their almost boundless submission to the power of the State. Too often the Lutheran Churches have failed to protest for so long, that they are left to preach and administer the sacraments in peace. In this Pastoral Letter there is a marvellous tone and spirit, recalling the Middle Ages, when it preached the law of God to which the power of the State is also subject. The last solemn declaration of the Council of the Norwegian Church also dealt with the question of law. When the Norwegians were forcibly mobilized in the Spring of 1943 for service which was in reality nothing else than German military service, the Church was the only Institution which protested and was able to protest. On May 8th, 1943, the Provisional Council

of the Church sent a letter to Quisling, signed by Hallesby and Hope, in which they stigmatized this mobilization as contrary to the common rights of the people, recalling the limitations of the Hague Convention on the subject of occupation. They pointed out that this mobilization caused grave struggles of conscience to the Norwegians. As a result of this protest, Hallesby and Hope lost their liberty. They were imprisoned and sent to Grini where they still are. The first and the last word from the Church on the subject of order in its fight was the statement: “Right and Conscience.”

Resignation of Bishops and Priests

The most remarkable event in the fight of our Church was the resignation by the priests of their official office, which took place in the Spring of 1942. On February 24th each of the seven bishops wrote a letter to the Minister of Cults in which he said: “I give you notice by this letter that I resign my office. That is to say: I return to the State what it has confided to me. The spiritual office and authority which was given to me by ordination before the altar remains with me of right by the will of God.” The bishops declared that they were unable any longer to continue their work in the service of a State which violated the rights of the Church and which unjustly sanctioned the violence of which the police were guilty. The bishops declared that they remained the servants of the Word of God and of the parishes. They drew a clear distinction between earthly and spiritual authority, between their administrative functions in the service of the State and their episcopal office as pastors of the faithful. The priests followed the example of the bishops, forced to it by numerous abuses on the part of the State towards the schools, youth, freedom of education and preaching. On Easter Day, April 5th, 1942, the majority of the priests read from the pulpit a declaration called “The Foundation of the Church.” This document is a clear witness to the independence of the Church *vis-à-vis* the State in spiritual questions and in the sovereignty of the Word of God, which is above all ideologies. After having read the document the priests solemnly declared that they were obliged by their conscience to lay down their office, but that they were resolved to continue their ministry, detached from their duty as servants of the State. Here was found the same distinction between the office of the State and the spiritual charge, which was the reason for resignation given by the bishops. In a few weeks, more than 90 per cent. of the priests had resigned their State positions.

The rupture between Church and the State in occupied Norway became complete at Easter, 1942. From that time the priests refused their salary paid by the State, and all the orders of the different State offices which were concerned with religion. They systematically returned the money and the letters which were sent to them by the Ministry of Cults. The priests continued to carry on religious services and other religious ceremonies except where they were forbidden to preach, deported or dismissed. At this time such decisions by the authorities were still respected. Later the orders and prohibitions of the State were openly disregarded. Since Easter, 1942, the Norwegian Church is no longer a State Church, but a Free Church, although it has continued to be a National Church (Folkekirke). Its basis is the baptism of children; it considers all baptized Norwegians as its members, so long as they have not left it. The members of the Nazi Nasjonal Samling, who wear the party badge receive the sacraments during religious services of the Norwegian Church, and they do so quite often. It is not a political church. But it has occurred that a priest at the Communion rails has passed a man who was ordained by one of our so-called bishops. Here it is a question of someone who has transgressed our religious order. There is only one other parallel example of a general resignation of religious Ministers. In 1843 at the Scottish Synod 474 priests resigned their offices. Their relations with the State were such that they were obliged to leave the Church and to found a Free Church. They freely renounced all the privileges of the State Church, their salary, their presbyteries and their churches in order to safeguard the integrity of the Church. On this occasion a Scottish lord wrote: "I am proud of my country. In no other country is such an action possible." A century later the Norwegian clergy did the same thing in a situation much more difficult and full of danger. In Scotland the resignations had been prepared by ten years of controversy and funds had been raised in order to found the Free Church. In Norway most of the priests had only a few hours, and at the most a few days, in which to make a decision. Censorship of telephones and posts made all consultation with their colleagues impossible. In Scotland 40 per cent. of the priests resigned, in Norway 90 per cent., but one must agree, that the violation of the rights of the Church of Scotland for its contemporaries and still less for us was not so revolting as the violations of right and violent measures that the Church of Norway had endured. Scotland in 1843 was a legal State, governed by law and

right, where open controversy was permitted. Norway in 1942 was a State governed by the police, which is precisely the opposite to a State ruled by law. We do not wish by this comparison to diminish the grandeur and heroism of what happened in Scotland, but we want to make clear the events in Norway. We have been witnesses of events which are as great as they are remarkable.

A Pastor Released

News of the release of Pastor Wisløff was given in *Svenska Morgonbladet* of August 22: "Pastor Wisløff has been released from Grini concentration camp and has again begun to preach wherever the authorities allow him to do so. The Nazis often refuse permission to travel and pretend that the sermons are political speeches. In many places laymen do the work of pastors and are very active. The Norwegian Church has many anxieties as 35 priests and three bishops are in the concentration camp at Lillehammer. The Nazis are also greatly hindering the work of the Norwegian Mission Organization. This organization has 228 missionaries in the field, of whom 90 per cent. have been at their posts longer than usual and are very overworked. It is naturally necessary for a large number of missionaries to be ready to leave for missionary work as soon as possible after the war. But the Mission Schools are closed and all the funds were confiscated some time ago. It has not been possible to send funds to the missionaries during the war, and the Norwegian Government in London and American Norwegians have supported them as much as possible. Three Mission Doctors are in Norway, unable to return to their work. There are still four in the Mission but two or three hospitals have no doctor. Good relations exist between the State Church and the Free Church organizations. All stand together in the fight for the same principles. A letter, in which the Norwegian Council of Missions protests against the measures taken by the Quisling authorities, has been read in all the churches."

Priest Dies in Prison

The Swedish paper, *Svenska Morgonbladet*, of August 18, 1944, writes:

"A Norwegian Lutheran priest, Pastor Infolf Boge, has died in prison at the age of 44. He was arrested and taken to Grini in 1943 and deported to Germany in February 1943. He died on April 1, but the news was not known until the middle of August. Pastor Boge was married and had several children. He was born at Bruvik, and took his Matriculation Examination in 1923. In 1926 he passed his examination in Theology

and became the Vicar of Hans in 1927. In 1930 he became Curate of Fjell, where the vicar was also arrested, so that the parish is now left without a priest.

PSEUDO-RELIGIOUS PAMPHLET IN HOLLAND

The clandestine paper, *Geillustreed Vrij Nederland*, end of May, 1944, writes: "A pamphlet is at present circulating in this country entitled 'Wachter wat is er van de nacht?' (Watchman, what of the night?). It is an appeal for faith and reflection. At first sight, it breathes a truly Christian spirit; we might even think that it was written by a clergyman, or by a man who is used to giving spiritual leadership. We agree with much of the contents. But nevertheless, we have the impression that the writer has not the right intentions. That is apparent from the fact that the writer himself suffers from the very defects with which he reproaches others. For he reproaches the underground press—he calls it illegal—which is supposed to be the cause of a serious weakening of Christian morals. According to him, this is proved by the pleasure taken in indulging in wishful thinking about a political and bloody St. Bartholomew's Eve, assisting in compiling murder lists, or in the preparation of other similar peoples' courts, and from the positive answer to the question whether deception and swindling are learned in wartime, and the abuse of the necessary anonymity.

"As regards the first, we should like to ask, Who does that kind of thing? Has the writer got any kind of proof that in Christian circles, engaged in underground work, there is any ambition to compile 'murder lists' or any desire for a St. Bartholomew's Eve? We only maintain positively that that is impossible. There is only a question of a demand for justice and, in certain cases, the application of justified self-defence. To put it mildly, the writer is guilty, according to the ninth commandment of the Heidelberg Catechism quoted by him, which lays down 'that I shall bear no false witness (that is, not against the anonymous brothers doing underground work), shall not misinterpret anyone's statements, shall not indulge in scandal or slander, shall not condemn anyone lightly or unheard, nor assist in condemning anyone.'

"In the second place, the writer refers to Dr. Los, who is supposed to have said recently: 'that we should here and now, even in the face of the enemy, as God's holy men, speak the truth or remain silent.' But what is the writer himself doing? Does he speak

the truth like a man called upon by God, in the face of the enemy? By no means. He writes an anonymous pamphlet and misuses his anonymity, by accusing his brothers in Christ before the public and the enemy. The pamphlet is printed clandestinely, and therefore cannot have been turned out except through deceit and delusion on the part of those persons engaged by the enemy to exercise control on the printing press. Nevertheless, the writer relied on the printing press and had God's blessing for it into the bargain. The writer tries to conceal his identity in all kinds of ways. One article is dated 'Somewhere in Europe,' March, 1944. In this he states that he is acquainted with all the difficulties of the present times, which he has experienced in his own person. This is an intimation; the unsuspecting reader is not told to think 'Heavens, the writer is probably imprisoned in Germany—it must be Colijn.' It does attach special significance to this statement. But anyone who reads how the writer is informed of Church questions in Holland up to the very last will know that this intimation is misleading.

"A writer who acts in such a way certainly has no right to criticize the underground press. We warn against this manifesto. In spite of its religious tone, it has a dangerous tendency, and notwithstanding the constructive parts, it has a destructive and weakening effect."

BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

In the absence through illness of the Archbishop of Canterbury the Rev. Dr. S. M. Berry presided at the fifth half-yearly meeting of the British Council of Churches, held in London, September 26th to 28th. Dr. Berry and Dr. J. H. Oldham were elected vice-presidents in succession to the Very Rev. Dr. J. Hutchison Cockburn and Lord Rochester. The Council discussed the task of the Churches in helping to rebuild rural community life; in the course of the discussion Bishop Tsu, of Kunming, South-west China, who was present as a visitor, spoke of similar work being done in his diocese where 80 per cent. of the population is rural. Among much other business the Council considered the reconstruction of Christian institutions in devastated Europe, religious freedom, plans for evangelism in the post-war situation and for strengthening relationships with the Churches of the United States both now and after the war. It was reported that steps are being taken for a post-war exchange of theological students between Great Britain and the United States and that an offer of scholarships had already been received.